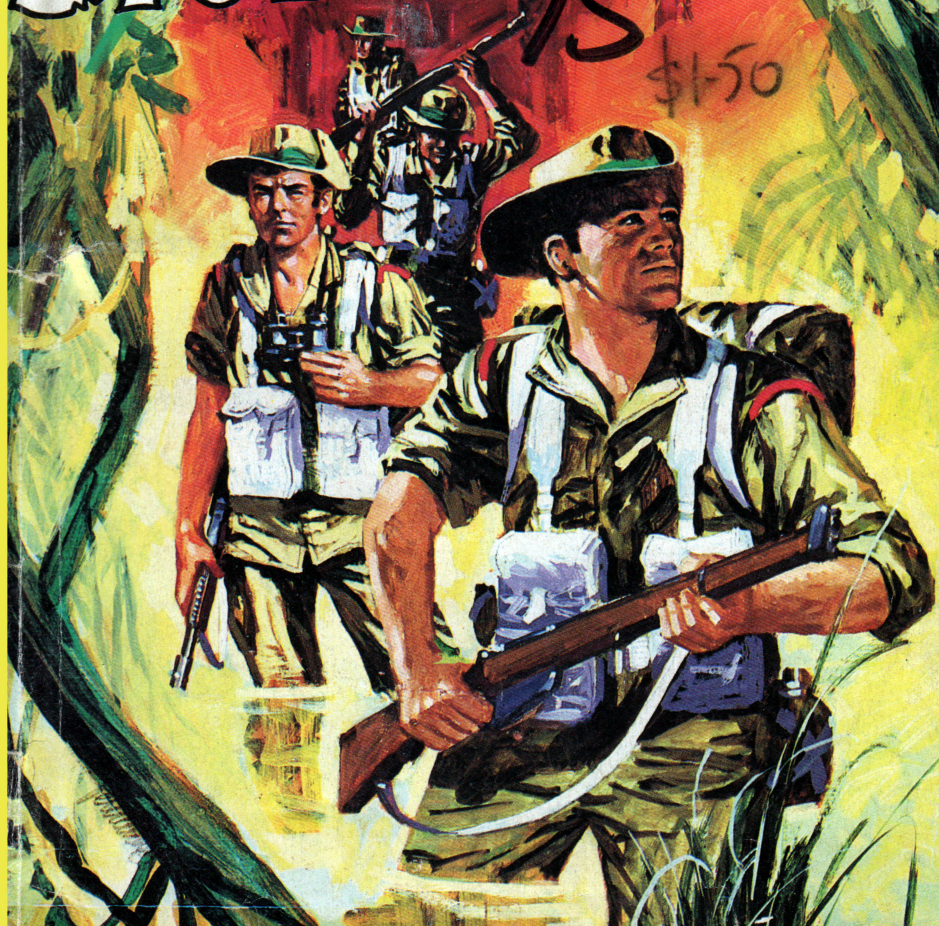


BATTLE

№100
30p

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STONE OF EVIL



STONE of EVIL

ON JANUARY 20th, 1942, THE JAPANESE ARMY ADVANCED INTO BURMA. BY THE BEGINNING OF MARCH THEY HAD TAKEN ITS CAPITAL, RANGOON. ON MAY 1st, THEY OCCUPIED MANDALAY, HALFWAY TO THE FRONTIER OF INDIA. NOTHING, IT SEEMED, COULD STOP THE ARMIES OF THE RISING SUN...



Chapter I. *THE EMERALD*

THE ALLIED FORCES, BRITISH, INDIAN AND BURMESE, HAD SUFFERED DEFEAT AFTER DEFEAT. MANY OF THEIR FORMATIONS HAD BEEN SMASHED AND FOUGHT ON ONLY AS SMALL ISOLATED UNITS . . .



THERE WERE EIGHT OF THEM LEFT IN THE SECTION, WITH SERGEANT VOKES LEADING THEM...



THERE WAS A LITTLE TRACK LEADING INTO THE VILLAGE. IT LOOKED AN ORDINARY ENOUGH PLACE, AND YET...

BR'RR! THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I FELT COLD SINCE I GOT TO BURMA.

IT'S SO STILL... AND LIFELESS...



IT WAS A TYPICAL BURMESE VILLAGE, EXCEPT THAT THE TEMPLE WAS LARGER THAN USUAL...

HEY, SARGE, COME AND HAVE A LOOK IN HERE.

RIGHT. MILSON AND HURN STAY ON GUARD AT THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE.



THE REST OF THEM WALKED INTO THE TEMPLE, AND PEERED UNCERTAINLY IN THE DIM LIGHT OF ITS MAIN CHAMBER . . .



AS THEIR EYES GREW ACCUSTOMED TO THE GLOOM THEY SAW WHAT WAS ATTRACTING BATES'S ATTENTION. IN THE CENTRE OF THE IDOL'S FOREHEAD SOMETHING GLOWED WITH A GREEN LIGHT . . .



A STIR RAN THROUGH THE GROUP AND THEIR EYES TURNED TO THEIR SERGEANT, FOR HE WAS THE ONLY AUTHORITY THEY HAD LEFT . . .

HOW ABOUT IT,
SARGE - I'LL SHIN UP AND
GET IT, SHALL I ?

NO POINT
IN LEAVING IT
FOR THE JAPS.

VOKES KNEW THEIR MORALE WAS LOW FOR THEY HAD BEEN RETREATING FOR WEEKS NOW. MANY OF THEIR COMPANIONS HAD BEEN KILLED AND THEY HAD SEEN NO OTHER ALLIED TROOPS FOR DAYS . . .

WHY NOT ? IF WE EVER GET
BACK TO INDIA WE MIGHT AS
WELL TAKE SOMETHING
BACK WITH US.

THERE WAS ONLY ONE VOICE RAISED IN PROTEST AS BATES STARTED HIS UPWARD CLIMB . . .

BUT—THIS
IS A TEMPLE— LIKE
SOMEWHERE HOLY!
I MEAN, SHOULD WE
STEAL SOMETHING
FROM IT ?

ARE YOU
OBJECTING,
CORPORAL ?

CORPORAL HODGES KNEW WHAT YOKES MEANT—THE GROUP HAD TO PROTECT ITSELF AGAINST BETRAYAL—THEY MUST ALL AGREE TO THE THEFT. AND HODGES LACKED THE COURAGE TO STAND ALONE AND STOP IT ...



THE STONE CAME LOOSE WITH A LITTLE NOISE THAT WAS ALMOST LIKE A SIGH ...



BATES'S CRY OF TRIUMPH MERGED WITH THE OMINOUS WHISTLE OF A MORTAR BOMB ...



BATES, EXPOSED ON THE BREAST OF THE IDOL, CAUGHT THE FULL FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION. HE WAS DEAD BEFORE HE HIT THE GROUND...

BATES IS A GONER!

GET OUT THE BACK WAY—QUICKLY!



THEY STUMBLED OUT THROUGH THE SMOKE AND THE DUST AND AS THEY WENT, WILKINSON PLUCKED THE EMERALD FROM BATES'S LIMP HAND...

COME ON, MOVE!

WE DON'T WANT TO LEAVE THIS BEHIND!



THEY RACED ACROSS THE OPEN SPACE BEHIND THE TEMPLE AND DIVED INTO THE COVER OF THE TREES. BULLETS WHINED AROUND THEM . . .



THEY HALTED FOR A MOMENT IN THE THICK UNDERGROWTH, PEERING BACK ANXIOUSLY, THEIR EARS COCKED FOR SOUNDS OF PURSUIT . . .



THERE WERE ONLY FIVE OF THEM . . .



EVERY MAN FROZE SUDDENLY. THERE WAS A RUSTLING NOISE IN THE UNDERGROWTH AS IF SOMETHING WAS CRAWLING TOWARDS THEM . . .



IT WAS HURN, ONE OF THE MEN WHO HAD BEEN LEFT ON GUARD . . .

SARGE -

HURN!

HE'S BEEN WOUNDED.



THEY GAVE HURN SOME HURRIED ROUGH FIRST-AID . . .

THERE WAS QUITE A LOT OF THEM. THEY GOT MILSON.

THEY'LL COVER BOTH PATHS OUT OF THE VILLAGE. WE'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE JUNGLE - FAST!



THEY HAD LEARNT ALREADY THE JAPANESE TACTIC OF LAYING AMBUSHES .
THEY WOULD HAVE TO GO THE HARD WAY, THROUGH THE THICK JUNGLE , AND
NOW THEY WERE BURDENED WITH A WOUNDED MAN . . .



IT WAS UNBEARABLY HOT AND STICKY . THE SWEAT COURSED OFF THEM AND RAN
DOWN THEIR BODIES IN RIVULETS AS THEY PUSHED ON AND ON . . .



THEY HAD NO WAY OF COVERING THEIR TRACKS AND THEY ALL KNEW THE JAPANESE WERE RELENTLESS PURSUERS . . .

I KEEP THINKING
I CAN HEAR SOMEONE,
SARGE.

SO DO I. HERE—
GIVE ME SOME
GRENADES.



VOKES PEGGED THE GRENADES TO THE GROUND AT THE SIDE OF THE TRACK THEY HAD MADE, THEN USED SOME OF THE STRONG VINES AS TRIP WIRES, STRINGING THEM ACROSS THE TRACK . . .

PULL THE PIN
OUT WHEN YOU'RE
SURE THE STICK
WILL HOLD THE
LEVER DOWN.



THEY SCATTERED LEAVES OVER THE VINES AND THE GRENADES AND HURRIED AFTER THE OTHERS . . .



TWENTY MINUTES LATER THEY HEARD THE FIRST EXPLOSION . . .

THAT'S ONE— BUT
THEY'RE NOT FAR
BEHIND US.

THEY WON'T MOVE SO
FAST NOW— THEY'LL BE LOOKING
FOR MORE BOOBY-TRAPS.

THEY WENT OVER A RIDGE AND THEN DOWN A SLOPE INTO A VALLEY. AT THE
BOTTOM WAS A SMALL CHAUNG OR STREAM . . .

STAY IN THE WATER—
THEN THEY CAN'T
TRACK US.

COME ON,
HURN— WE'LL
MAKE IT!

THEY TOOK SPECIAL CARE TO COVER UP THEIR TRACKS AT THE POINT WHERE THEY LEFT THE STREAM. AND AT LAST VOKES FELT THEY COULD HALT . . .



WE'LL CAMP HERE FOR THE NIGHT. BUT A GUARD WILL HAVE TO WATCH THE WAY DOWN TO THE STREAM, AND NO FIRES!

THEY ATE THEIR RATIONS COLD. TO CHEER THEM UP, WILKINSON BROUGHT OUT THE EMERALD FROM HIS POCKET . . .

HAVE A DEKKO AT THAT, MATES! WHEN WE GET BACK TO INDIA, THAT'S GOING TO MAKE US ALL RICH.

IF WE GET BACK TO INDIA!



IT WAS A DEEP CLEAR GREEN — THAT SEEMED ICY COLD TO THE TOUCH .

B'RR ! IT GIVES ME THE SHIVERS . I WISH WE HADN'T TAKEN IT — WE'VE HAD NOTHING BUT BAD LUCK SINCE WE DID .



VOKES CALLED HODGES TO ONE SIDE ...

I'M WORRIED ABOUT HURN — THAT BULLET IS STILL IN HIS SHOULDER . IF WE DON'T GET IT OUT — HE'LL SNUFF IT, YOU KNOW .

BUT WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO TAKE IT OUT — AND WE'VE GOT NO INSTRUMENTS...



BY MORNING , HURN WAS DELIRIOUS . THEY MADE A ROUGH STRETCHER AND SET OUT, CARRYING HIM ...

WHY HAVE YOU GAGGED HIM ?



BECAUSE HE STARTED SCREAMING WITH THE PAIN — AND THE JAPS MIGHT HEAR HIM . IT'S FOR THE GOOD OF ALL OF US — HURN INCLUDED !

THEY CARRIED THE WOUNDED MAN FOR TWO DAYS, BUT HE GOT WORSE ALL THE TIME, AND HE DIED ON THE SECOND EVENING . . .



NEXT MORNING THEY CAME OUT OF THE JUNGLE AT LAST . . .



THERE WAS AN OFFICER WITH THE SOLDIERS. VOKES LOOKED AT THE INSIGNIA ON HIS LAPELS . . .

YES, I'M A DOCTOR—CAN I HELP YOU?



NOT NOW, SIR. BUT IF WE'D MET YOU A DAY EARLIER YOU MIGHT HAVE SAVED ONE OF US.

BUT AT LEAST THEY HAD MADE CONTACT WITH THEIR OWN TROOPS . . .

THIS IS THE CHINDWIN RIVER. OUR TROOPS ARE CROSSING BY STEAMER FROM SHWEGYIN. I SHOULD GET YOUR CHAPS THERE AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN.



THE CROSSING WAS NOT A DIRECT ONE. STEAMERS LEAVING SHWEGYIN HAD TO GO SIX MILES UPSTREAM TO KALEWA, UNLOAD AND TURN ROUND. IT WAS A SLOW BUSINESS . . .

HURRY! HURRY! THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF MEN BEHIND YOU!



SHWEGYIN WAS A BOTTLENECK — AND INEVITABLY, IT ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF THE JAPANESE COMMANDER.



YOKES'S PARTY HAD ITS FIRST HINT OF TROUBLE WHEN A SWARM OF SILVER SHAPES FLEW OVERHEAD . . .



THEY FORCED THEIR TIRED LIMBS TO MOVE FASTER, BUT AS THEY GOT NEARER TO SHWEGYIN THE NOISE OF BATTLE GREW. AT LENGTH THEY CAME OUT ON AN ESCARPMENT ABOVE THE TOWN . . .



Chapter 2. *CURSE OF DAVILA*

THERE WAS NOTHING FOR IT. THEY MOVED BACK INTO THE JUNGLE AND TRIED TO DETOUR ROUND THE ENEMY...

WE'LL GO BY NIGHT. THAT'LL GIVE US THE BEST CHANCE OF SLIPPING PAST THEM.



ALL WENT WELL FOR A TIME. THEY FOUND A TINY TRACK THAT WAS GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND STARTED ALONG IT. JACKMAN WAS IN THE LEAD — WHICH WAS UNLUCKY FOR HIM . . .



JACKMAN WENT DOWN — AND THE OTHERS
PLUNGED THEMSELVES INTO THE JUNGLE
AND RAN FOR THEIR LIVES . . .

I'VE
LOST MY
HELMET!

TO THE
DEVIL WITH
THAT — COME
ON!



THEY RAN TILL THEY WERE UTTERLY EXHAUSTED . . .

WAS
JACKMAN
KILLED?

MUST HAVE
BEEN! THAT JAP
GOT HIM IN THE
CHEST.



THEY HOPED THEIR COMPANION HAD DIED QUICKLY, FOR THE JAPANESE WERE ALREADY KNOWN FOR THEIR CRUELTY TOWARDS PRISONERS. FOR THE REST OF THEM, THERE WAS NO RESPIRE . . .



BUT KABAW VALLEY HAD EARNED THE DREAD NAME OF "DEATH VALLEY"—FOR A VIRULENT TYPE OF MALARIA INFESTED IT...



OUT OF BRANCHES AND GROUND SHEETS, THEY MADE A ROUGH SHELTER IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP WILKINSON DRY.



WILKINSON HAD ONE BRIEF PERIOD OF CONSCIOUSNESS—AND DURING IT, HE FORCED VOKES TO TAKE THE EMERALD.



BUT WILKINSON DIED NEXT DAY, AND THE OTHERS MOVED ON . . .

WHY DON'T WE GET RID OF THAT EMERALD? WE'VE HAD NOTHING BUT BAD LUCK SINCE WE STOLE IT.

WE CAN'T BE SURE IT'S THE EMERALD!



THE GLEAMING BEAUTY OF THE STONE SEEMED TO MOCK THEM AS RAGGED, DIRTY, UNSHAVEN, AND HUNGRY, THEY ARGUED ABOUT IT . . .

THERE WERE EIGHT OF US WHEN WE TOOK IT - NOW THERE'RE THREE!

IT'S AN AWFUL LOT OF MONEY TO THROW AWAY.

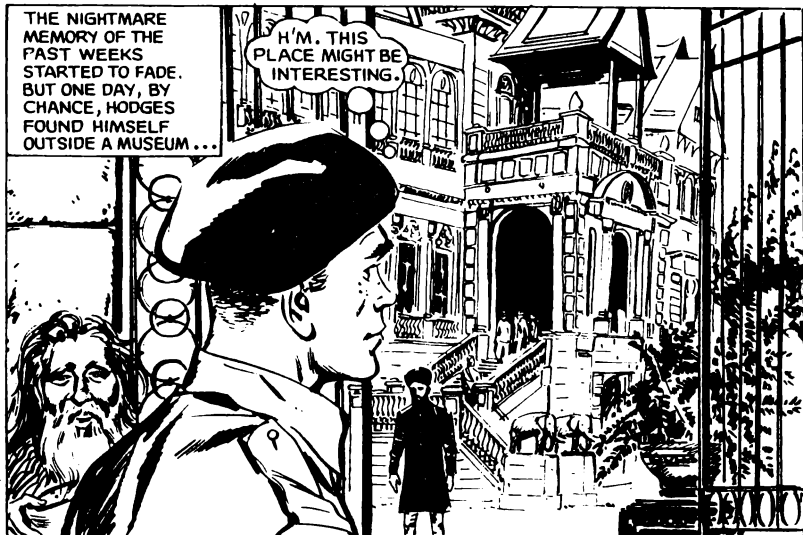
I RECKON WE MIGHT AS WELL KEEP IT.





THE NIGHTMARE
MEMORY OF THE
PAST WEEKS
STARTED TO FADE.
BUT ONE DAY, BY
CHANCE, HODGES
FOUND HIMSELF
OUTSIDE A MUSEUM...

H'M. THIS
PLACE MIGHT BE
INTERESTING.



ONE GALLERY HELD A DISPLAY OF STATUARY...

VISHNU, THE
PRESERVER—HE
LOOKS FRIENDLY
ENOUGH.



PUT AT THE END OF THE GALLERY IN A SMALL, LOCKED GLASS CASE, HE FOUND THE THING HE WAS SEEKING . . .

DAVILA — AND EVEN WHEN YOU'RE **THAT** SIZE, YOU LOOK NASTY ENOUGH.



A SOFT VOICE BEHIND HIM STARTLED HODGES . . .

I SEE YOU ARE INTERESTED IN DAVILA. HE HAS SUCH AN EVIL REPUTATION THAT WE HAVE TO KEEP HIM LOCKED AWAY—NONE OF THE CLEANERS WOULD DARE TO EVEN DUST HIM.



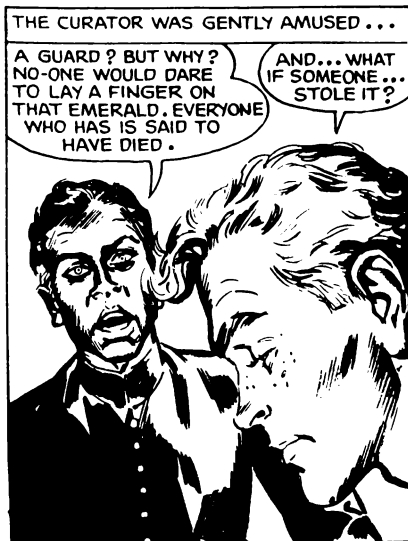
I'M NOT SURPRISED. I SAW ANOTHER ONE LIKE THIS IN BURMA.

THE CURATOR WAS INSTANTLY INTERESTED AND ESCORTED HODGES TO HIS OFFICE . . .

THE ONE YOU SAW IS THE ORIGINAL IDOL, OF COURSE—THE MOST MALEVOLENT DAVILA OF THEM ALL. DID YOU SEE THE EMERALD IN ITS FOREHEAD?

YES . . . YES, I DID!





ENGROSSED IN HIS SUBJECT THE CURATOR TALKED HAPPILY ON, BUT AT LAST HODGES WAS ABLE TO BREAK AWAY AND STUMBLE OUT INTO THE STREET . . .



HODGES WAS THROWN TO THE GROUND AND STUNNED. THEY PATCHED HIM UP IN THE CASUALTY DEPARTMENT OF A HOSPITAL . . .

YOU SHOULD STAY HERE FOR A DAY SO THAT WE CAN KEEP AN EYE ON YOU.

NO THANKS—
I'VE GOT TO GET BACK.



SERGEANT VOKES WAS SURPRISED TO SEE CORPORAL HODGES BACK EARLY FROM LEAVE . . .

AND YOU CAME BACK TO TELL ME THAT? BUT IT'S JUST SUPERSTITION—THERE'S NO PROOF!

ISN'T THERE? THE CURATOR TOLD ME THAT THAT VILLAGE WAS DESERTED—THAT NO-ONE HAD LIVED THERE FOR YEARS AND YEARS...

VOKES REMEMBERED THE STRANGELY STILL ATMOSPHERE OF THE PLACE . . .

NOBODY **CAN** LIVE THERE—AND **NOTHING** GROWS THERE! IT WAS DESERTED ALL RIGHT, SO WHY HADN'T THE JUNGLE MOVED IN? WHY WASN'T IT OVERGROWN?

I SUPPOSE THAT IS STRANGE...





THEY WERE USHERED INTO A BACK ROOM WHERE THE FAT BENGALI MERCHANT SAT WITH HIS OLD MOTHER...

A LARGE STONE—WITH MANY FLAWS, NO DOUBT.

IT IS PERFECT—AND PRICELESS!



THE MERCHANT'S EYES WIDENED GREEDILY WHEN HE SAW THAT WHAT VOKES SAID WAS TRUE. THEY BARGAINED FOR SOME TIME...

I WILL GIVE YOU TWENTY THOUSAND RUPEES.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH, BUT WE'LL TAKE IT—IN CASH, NOW.

DO NOT BUY, MY SON.



THE MERCHANT IGNORED THE OLD WOMAN'S INTERVENTION. THE BARGAIN WAS STRUCK AND THE TWO SOLDIERS DEPARTED WITH THE MONEY.

YOU ARE A FOOL THERE IS MUCH EVIL HERE.

OF COURSE— THEY STOLE THIS. OTHERWISE WHY SHOULD THEY SELL IT TO ME FOR A TENTH OF WHAT IT IS WORTH?



VOKES AND HODGES HAD £ 750 APIECE, TUCKED AWAY IN SPECIAL BODY BELTS THEY HAD BOUGHT . . .

I FEEL A BIT BETTER NOW WITHOUT THAT THING.

AND I FEEL A LOT BETTER NOW I'VE GOT THIS CASH!



BUT THEY HAD NO TIME TO SPEND THE MONEY BEFORE THEY WERE BOTH POSTED TO A SPECIAL TRAINING CAMP. NEW UNIFORMS WERE ISSUED TO THEM THERE . . .

IT'S JUNGLE GREEN— AND YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

YES— WE'RE GOING BACK INTO BURMA!

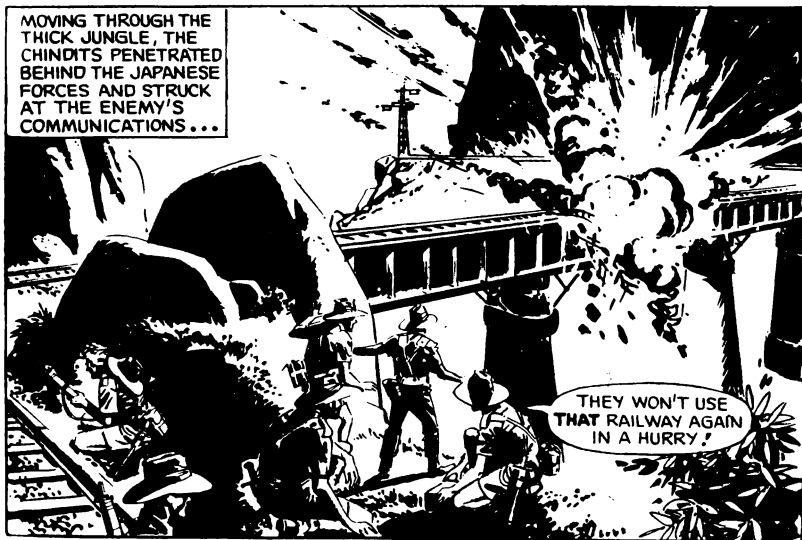


Chapter 3. *TRAIL OF DEATH*

THEY HAD JOINED A GROUP OF BRIGADIER ORDE WINGATE'S CHINDITS. AFTER SOME MONTHS OF INTENSIVE TRAINING THEIR COLUMN MOVED THROUGH THE OUTPOSTS OF THE FORWARD BRITISH TROOPS AND CAME TO THE CHINDWIN RIVER. . . .



MOVING THROUGH THE THICK JUNGLE, THE CHINDITS PENETRATED BEHIND THE JAPANESE FORCES AND STRUCK AT THE ENEMY'S COMMUNICATIONS. . . .



THERE WERE EIGHT COLUMNS IN THE BRIGADE, EACH MUSTERING OVER 300 MEN. THE VARIOUS COLUMNS SPREAD OVER A LARGE AREA, CAUSING AS MUCH DISORGANISATION AND DEVASTATION AS THEY COULD . . .



THE JAPANESE WERE QUICK TO REACT . . .

GO! THEY HAVE COME TO BURMA. NOW WE SHALL SEE THAT THEY DO NOT LEAVE IT!



THEIR JOB DONE, THE COLUMNS SET OUT SEPARATELY FOR INDIA—AND NONE OF THE CHINDITS WERE MORE PLEASED THAN HODGES AND VOKES .

WE'VE GOT MORE COMPANY THAN WE HAD LAST TIME WE CAME THIS WAY .



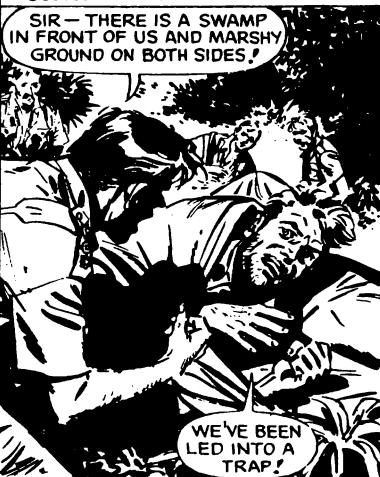
I DON'T LIKE THAT SMOKE—I'VE HEARD OF FIFTH COLUMNISTS DOING THAT TO SHOW THE JAPS WHERE WE ARE .

IT WAS A FEATURELESS PIECE OF COUNTRY AND THE COLUMN COMMANDER WAS GLAD WHEN A BURMESE PRIEST OFFERED TO GUIDE THEM . . .



BETTER GOING EH? FINDING THIS CHAP WAS A STROKE OF LUCK .

BUT THAT NIGHT, THE PRIEST DISAPPEARED AND AT DAWN, THEY DISCOVERED WHY . . .



SIR—THERE IS A SWAMP IN FRONT OF US AND MARSHY GROUND ON BOTH SIDES!

WE'VE BEEN LED INTO A TRAP!

THEY GUESSED THAT IT WOULD BE FATAL TO GO BACK AND CONCENTRATED ON TRYING TO FIND A WAY THROUGH THE MARSHY GROUND. BUT AT NOON THE JAPANESE ATTACK STARTED . . .

THREE-INCH MORTAR! AND WE'RE SITTING DUCKS! TELL THE MENTO TO DIG IN.



THEY WERE SHELLED AND MORTARED TILL NIGHT FALL— AND WITH THEIR LIGHT WEAPONS THERE WAS LITTLE THEY COULD DO TO RETALIATE . . .

IF WE STAY HERE WE SHALL BE BUTCHERED. THERE ARE **SOME** FIRM PATCHES OF GROUND IN THAT MARSH. THE MEN MUST SPLIT INTO SMALL PARTIES AND TRY TO GET OUT.



VOLES AND HOGUES, AS USUAL, STUCK TOGETHER . . .

TOMMETT! THIS WAY, TOMMETT!

JAPS! KEEP GOING STRAIGHT AHEAD.



THEY HEARD DISTANT SHOUTS OF ALARM AS SOME OF THEIR COMRADES LOST THEIR FOOTING AND WERE TRAPPED IN THE TREACHEROUS GROUND . . .

AAAAH !

WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING — HE'S TOO FAR AWAY — KEEP GOING .



THEY CAME OUT OF THE NIGHTMARISH SWAMP AS THE SUN ROSE . . .

EIGHT MEN...

JUST LIKE IT WAS BEFORE...

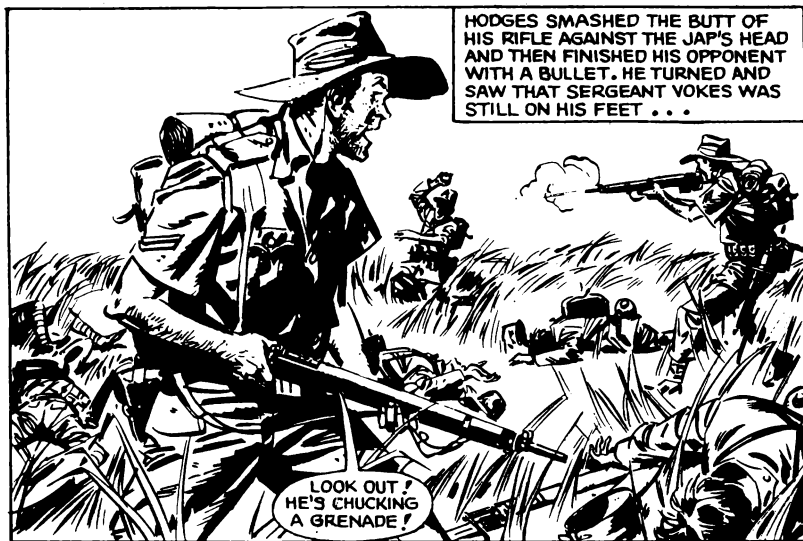


THE SMALL GROUP OF CHINDITS WERE JUST CONGRATULATING THEMSELVES ON THEIR ESCAPE, WHEN A SCREAMING GROUP OF JAPANESE CHARGED OUT OF THE UNDERGROWTH.



A SWARTHY THICK-SET JAP THRUST HIS LONG BAYONET MURDEROUSLY FORWARD AT HODGES . . .





VOKES'S AIM WAS TRUE AND THE JAP TOPPLED BACKWARDS. BUT THE GRENADE HAD ALREADY LEFT HIS HAND - AND IT EXPLODED WITH A SHARP CRACK RIGHT AT THE SERGEANT'S FEET . . .



THE SERGEANT HAD VERY LITTLE TIME - AND HE KNEW IT . . .

YOU WERE RIGHT, CORPORAL, WE SHOULD NEVER HAVE TAKEN THAT EMERALD! ALL THE OTHERS ARE DEAD - AND IT'S NOT JUST US - THE WHOLE COLUMN TRAPPED . . .

TAKE IT EASY, SARGE.



VOKES PUSHED THE MONEY BELT INTO HODGES'S HANDS . . .

BUY BACK THE EMERALD AND TAKE IT BACK TO THE IDOL - IT'S THE ONLY WAY. PROMISE?



ALL RIGHT, SERGEANT - THAT'S WHAT I'LL DO.

NOW HODGES WAS THE ONLY SURVIVOR . . .



MAYBE HE WAS JUST RAMBLING - OR MAYBE HE COULD SEE THINGS CLEARLY.





CHOLERA HAD SWEEPED THROUGH THE VILLAGE. THERE WAS NOT A LIVING SOUL TO BE SEEN AS HODGES ENTERED THE MEAN LITTLE STREET...

EVERYWHERE THE STONE GOES IT LEAVES A TRAIL OF DEATH.



HE SEARCHED THROUGH HUT AFTER HUT UNTIL HE FOUND THE OLD WOMAN.

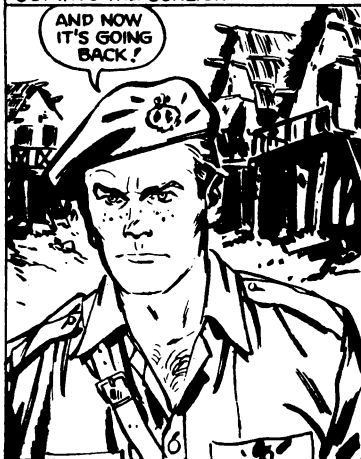
I'VE COME TO TAKE IT BACK - ALL YOUR MONEY IS HERE.



WITHOUT A WORD, HER EYES BURNING WITH ACCUSATION, SHE POINTED TO A SMALL, WOODEN BOX . . .

HE LEFT THE MONEY BELTS ON THE BED AND TURNING HIS BACK ON THE OLD WOMAN'S SILENT HATRED, STRODE OUT INTO THE SUNLIGHT...

AND NOW IT'S GOING BACK!



HE RETURNED TO HIS CAMP ONLY TO PICK UP A STEN GUN, SOME EQUIPMENT, AND HIS JUNGLE GREEN BATTLEDRESS. TWO DAYS LATER, HE WAS POSTED AS A DESERTER...



BUT CORPORAL HODGES WAS WHERE NOBODY WOULD EXPECT TO FIND A DESERTER — SLIPPING PAST HIS OWN FORWARD TROOPS IN THE FRONT LINE...



HE REACHED THE CHINDWIN RIVER. LASHING TWO LENGTHS OF BAMBOO TOGETHER AND PUTTING HIS POSSESSIONS TOGETHER ON TOP, HE STRUCK OUT FOR THE FAR BANK . . .



NO MOON—
THAT'S A BLESSING—
I MIGHT GET SHOT AT
FROM EITHER SIDE.

THE LONELINESS AND THE SENSE OF OPPRESSION FROM THE JUNGLE MIGHT HAVE FRIGHTENED MANY MEN, BUT HODGES FELT A STRANGE LIGHTNESS OF HEART . . .



FOR THE FIRST TIME
SINCE WE TOOK THAT
EMERALD I FEEL I'M
DOING RIGHT.

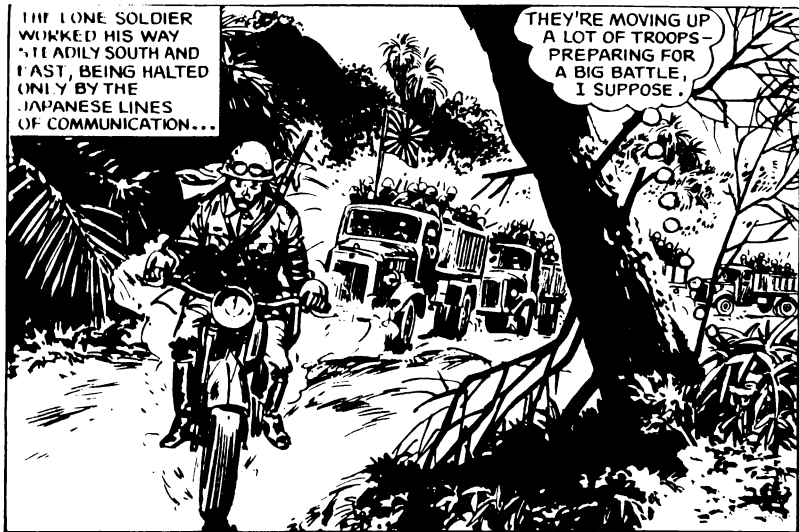
HE CARRIED A MINIMUM OF RATIONS WITH HIM. IT MIGHT NOT EVEN BE ENOUGH FOR THE RETURN JOURNEY, BUT HE WAS UNWORRIED . . .



ONCE I RETURN THAT
STONE THE CURSE WILL BE
OFF ME AND MY MATES AND
WE CAN EXPECT A BIT OF
GOOD LUCK FOR A
CHANGE.

THE LONE SOLDIER
WORKED HIS WAY
STEADILY SOUTH AND
EAST, BEING HALTED
ONLY BY THE
JAPANESE LINES
OF COMMUNICATION...

THEY'RE MOVING UP
A LOT OF TROOPS -
PREPARING FOR
A BIG BATTLE,
I SUPPOSE.



HODGES WAS, IN FACT,
WITNESSING THE
PREPARATIONS FOR
THE IMPHAL-KOIHMA
BATTLE WHICH THE
JAPANESE WERE
CONFIDENT WOULD
SWEEP ASIDE THE
ALLIED ARMIES...

WE WILL
ANNIHILATE THE
ENEMY! AND THEN
WE SHALL HAVE
INDIA AT OUR
MERCY!

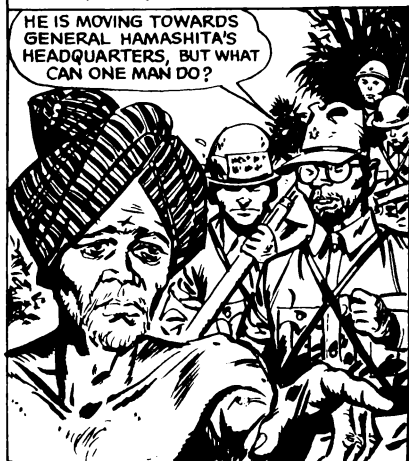


THE JAPANESE COLUMNS USED NATIVE TRACKERS TO GUIDE THEM OVER LITTLE-USED MOUNTAIN PATHS AND IT WAS ONE OF THESE THAT DETECTED HODGES'S FOOTPRINTS . . .



THE ACTIONS OF THE CHINDITS HAD ALERTED THE JAPANESE TO THE DANGERS OF SABOTAGE, SO THE COLUMN COMMANDER DESPATCHED A PARTY TO HUNT DOWN THE INTRUDER . . .

HE IS MOVING TOWARDS GENERAL HAMASHITA'S HEADQUARTERS, BUT WHAT CAN ONE MAN DO ?



BUT HODGES SLIPPED PAST THE GENERAL'S CAMP AT NIGHT AND DIVED INTO THE THICK JUNGLE BEYOND . . .

THOUGHT I WAS NEVER GOING TO GET PAST THAT LOT—JAPS EVERYWHERE . . .



ANOTHER OF THEM DREW BACK HIS ARM TO THROW A GRENADE, BUT DIED BEFORE HE COULD COMPLETE THE MOVEMENT AND THE GRENADE EXPLODED IN HIS FINGERS . . .



THE FOURTH MAN NEARLY GOT TO HODGES. HIS FANATICAL CHARGE CARRIED HIM FORWARD EVEN THOUGH THE CORPORAL COULD SEE HIS BULLETS HITTING HOME . . .



HE CAN'T KEEP GOING! HE'S DEAD ON HIS FEET!

BANZAI...!

THE MAN MADE ONE THRUST WITH HIS BAYONET, MISSED, AND TOPPLED INTO THE DUST. HODGES WAITED FOR A WHILE THEN STOOD UP AND LOOKED ROUND...

FOUR OF THEM...



HODGES TURNED AND WALKED TOWARDS THE TEMPLE. BUT AS HE DID SO, THE JAPANESE SERGEANT ROSE FROM HIS PLACE OF CONCEALMENT...



HOOKE'S ENTERED
THE TEMPLE'S MAIN
CHAMBER AND STOOD
FACING DAVILA...



THE CORPORAL TOOK THE
EMERALD FROM HIS POCKET
AND HELD IT UP...

HERE IT IS,
DAVILA. I'VE
BROUGHT IT
BACK...



HODGES CLIMBED UP AND
REACHED ACROSS TO
REPLACE THE EMERALD
IN ITS SETTING. EVEN AS
HE DID SO, THE JAPANESE
SERGEANT'S PISTOL
CRACKED . . .

AAAAH!



HODGES'S LIFELESS
BODY CRASHED DOWN
AND THE JAPANESE
SERGEANT BENT
FORWARD, ATTRACTED
BY THE GLEAM OF
THE STONE . . .

AH SO!

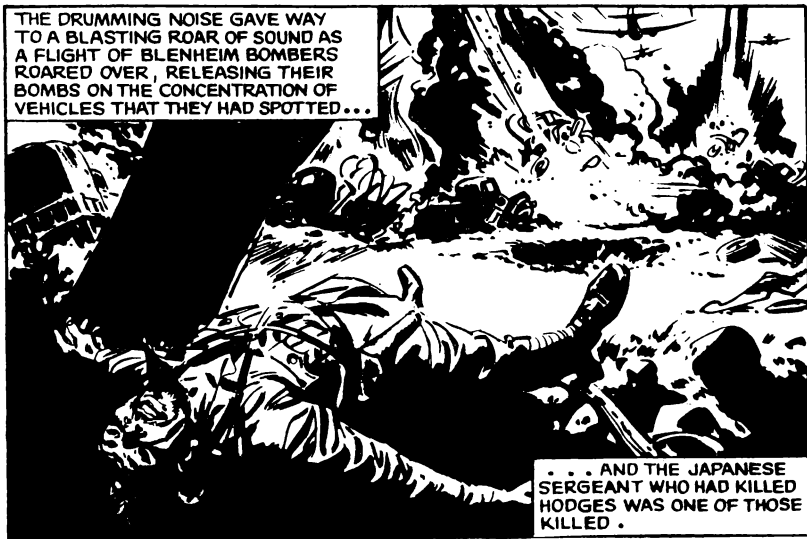


THE SERGEANT
MARCHED BACK
THE WAY HE HAD
COME, STOPPING
AT GENERAL
HAMASHITA'S
CAMP FOR FOOD...



THERE WAS A FAINT DRUMMING NOISE IN THE SKY, BUT HE WAS TOO
INTERESTED IN THE EMERALD TO PAY IT ANY ATTENTION...

THE DRUMMING NOISE GAVE WAY
TO A BLASTING ROAR OF SOUND AS
A FLIGHT OF BLENHEIM BOMBERS
ROARED OVER, RELEASING THEIR
BOMBS ON THE CONCENTRATION OF
VEHICLES THAT THEY HAD SPOTTED...



... AND THE JAPANESE
SERGEANT WHO HAD KILLED
HODGES WAS ONE OF THOSE
KILLED.

AN OFFICER PICKED THE EMERALD FROM THE SERGEANT'S LIFELESS FINGERS AND TOOK IT TO GENERAL HAMASHITA AS HE SCRAMBLED OUT OF A SLIT TRENCH...

WE FOUND THIS,
GENERAL SAN—A
SERGEANT HAD IT.

AN EMERALD!
AND WITHOUT
FLAW!



THE LIGHT SPARKLED
IN THE COOL GREEN
DEPTHS OF THE STONE...

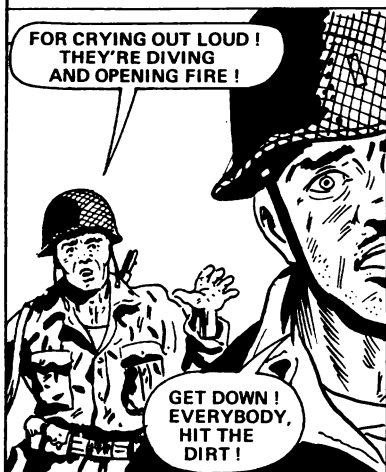
IT IS A SIGN—
AN OMEN FOR
THE BATTLE TO
COME! WE GO
FORWARD TO
VICTORY!



THEY WERE SPITFIRES – BUT
FRIENDLY...?

FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!
THEY'RE DIVING
AND OPENING FIRE!

GET DOWN!
EVERYBODY,
HIT THE
DIRT!



THE FIGHTERS RAKED THE COLUMN
OF INFANTRY WITH CANNON AND
MACHINE GUN FIRE...

TRIGGER-
HAPPY
FOOLS!

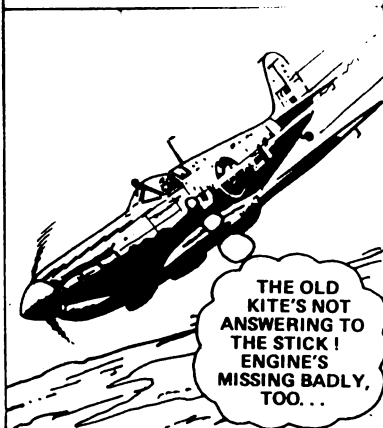


AS THE SPITFIRES PULLED OUT, ONE OF
THE PILOTS RECOGNISED THE MEN BELOW...

FOR PETE'S
SAKE HOLD IT!
THOSE AREN'T
JERRIES! THEY'RE
YANKS!



THE PILOT WHO HAD SHOUTED
OVER THE R/T SYSTEM WAS A
YOUNGSTER CALLED TOM DROCHAID.
HE WAS IN TROUBLE...

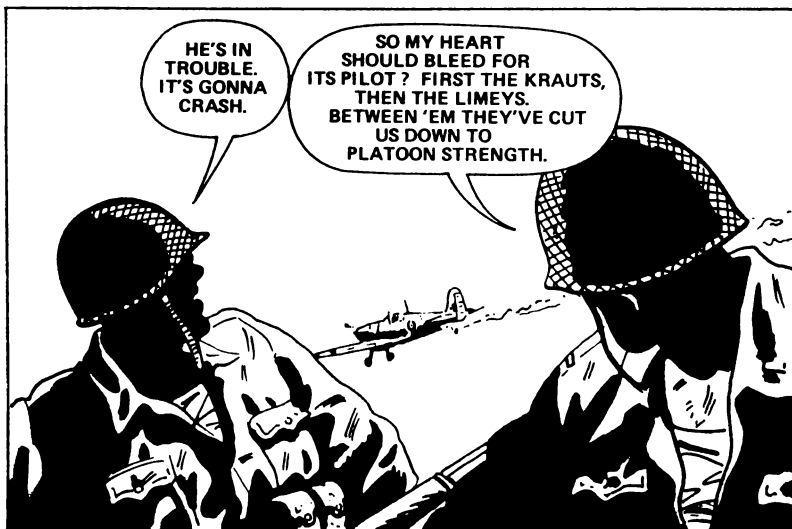


THE SPITFIRE HAD TAKEN PUNISHMENT
IN A HIT AND RUN RAID ON A NAZI
FLAK BATTERY 20 MINUTES AGO...



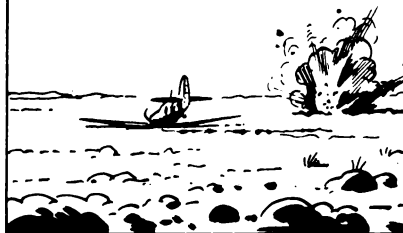
HE'S IN
TROUBLE.
IT'S GONNA
CRASH.

SO MY HEART
SHOULD BLEED FOR
ITS PILOT? FIRST THE KRAUTS,
THEN THE LIMEYS.
BETWEEN 'EM THEY'VE CUT
US DOWN TO
PLATOON STRENGTH.



THE STRICKEN FIGHTER SKIDDED OVER THE SAND AND SLEWED TO A HALT, DRAWING FIRE FROM AN ENEMY MORTAR. . .

THE GUY IN THAT KITE COULD BE HURT, TOO HURT TO MOVE !



LET HIM SWEAT. NOBODY IN THIS OUTFIT'S RISKING HIS NECK ANY MORE. WE'RE HIGH-TAILING IT FOR OUR OWN LINES, SERGEANT. GET THE BOYS MOVING. . .

BACK IN THEIR FOXHOLES, THE SURVIVORS OF COMPANY "B" STARED ACROSS THE SANDY WASTES OF NO MAN'S LAND. . .

I CAN SEE THE LIMEY PILOT. SEEMS LIKE HE'S TRYING TO GET OUT OF HIS COCKPIT.

THE KRAUTS'VE STOPPED WASTING MORTAR-SHELLS TRYING TO HIT HIM, SIR. HOW ABOUT SOMEBODY GOING OUT. . .

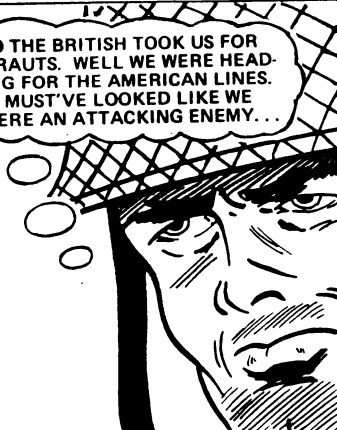


REMEMBER WHAT I SAID? YOU RISK THE LIVES OF ANY OF THE BOYS BY SENDING 'EM OUT THERE, AND I'LL HAVE YOU BUSTED TO PRIVATE !



BUT LATER, WHEN THE
LIEUTENANT HURRIED TO THE
REAR...

SO THE BRITISH TOOK US FOR
KRAUTS. WELL WE WERE HEAD-
ING FOR THE AMERICAN LINES.
IT MUST'VE LOOKED LIKE WE
WERE AN ATTACKING ENEMY...



SUDDENLY BUCK MADE UP HIS MIND...

THE LIEUTENANT'S
WRONG. I'M
GOING OUT
THERE. COVER MY
BACK, BOYS.



THE LIEUTENANT
CAN'T SAY I'M
RISKING THE LIVES
OF ANY OF THE BOYS.
STILL, I GUESS I'LL
BE BUSTED DOWN TO
PRIVATE ANYWAY...



HE REACHED THE PLANE WITHOUT MISHAP, TO LEARN THE EXTENT OF THE PILOT'S INJURY...

BUSTED LEG?
OKAY, JUST RELAX
AND I'LL GET YOU
OUT OF THERE
IN NO TIME
AT ALL...

HOLD IT!
LOOK - THE
JERRIES
ARE MOVING
FORWARD!



THEY'RE GONNA COUNTER-ATTACK
THE REMNANTS OF MY COMPANY.
TROUBLE IS THE GUYS CAN'T SEE
'EM FROM THE AMERICAN LINES.



AND WE'RE
SLAP-BANG
IN THEIR
PATH!

I'D BEST
GET YOU
OUT OF
HERE - AND
FAST!

NOT YET!
MY KITE
MIGHT NOT
BE ABLE TO
FLY - BUT SHE
CAN STILL
FIGHT!

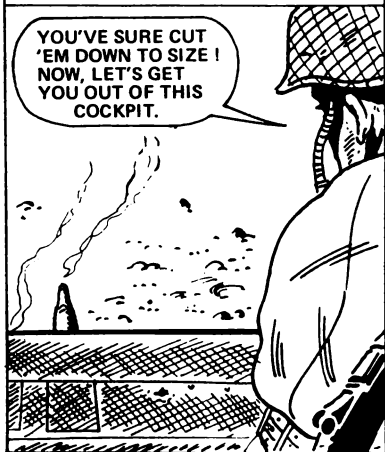


ADVANCING ON A NARROW FRONT,
THE NAZIS WERE SUDDENLY LASHED
BY A HURRICANE OF FIRE FROM
THE SPITFIRE'S CANNONS
AND MACHINE GUNS. . .



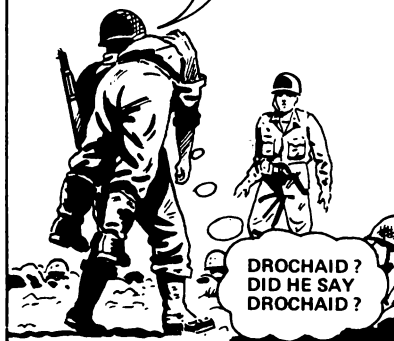
TOM DROCHAID KEPT UP THAT
DEVASTATING FUSILLADE UNTIL
HE RAN OUT OF AMMO. . .

YOU'VE SURE CUT
'EM DOWN TO SIZE !
NOW, LET'S GET
YOU OUT OF THIS
COCKPIT.



WHEN THE SERGEANT ARRIVED
BACK IN THE AMERICAN LINES, HE WAS
CONFRONTED BY HIS IRATE COMPANY
COMMANDER. . .

BEFORE YOU TELL ME I'M BUSTED,
LOO'TENANT DROCHAID, YOU'D
BEST HEAR WHAT I'VE GOTTA SAY. . .

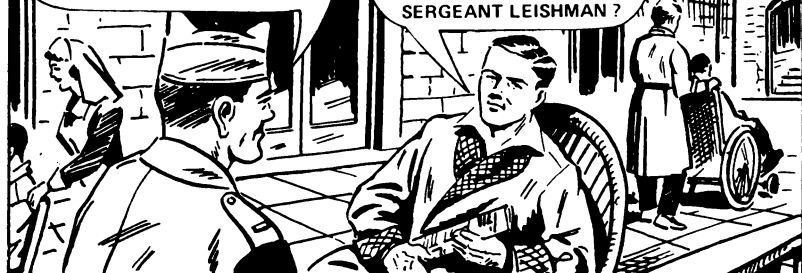


DROCHAID ?
DID HE SAY
DROCHAID ?

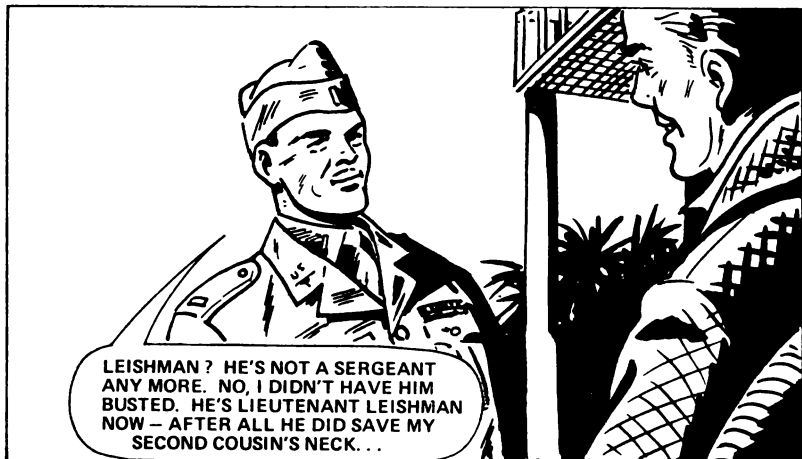
A FEW WEEKS LATER TOM DROCHAID'S NAMESAKE VISITED HIM IN A TUNISIAN HOSPITAL...

GRANDFATHER
CAME FROM DRUMBAIN
IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS.
HIS NAME WAS TOM, SAME
AS YOURS. HE HAD A
BROTHER CALLED FERGUS.

FERGUS WAS
MY GRANDFATHER
GUESS THAT MAKES
US SECOND COUSINS!
TELL ME, THOUGH - WHAT
HAPPENED TO
SERGEANT LEISHMAN?



LEISHMAN? HE'S NOT A SERGEANT
ANY MORE. NO, I DIDN'T HAVE HIM
BUSTED. HE'S LIEUTENANT LEISHMAN
NOW - AFTER ALL HE DID SAVE MY
SECOND COUSIN'S NECK...



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NOTABLE WEAPONS OF WORLD WAR 2

QUEEN OF THE SEAS?

Even before the end of World War 1 far-sighted naval experts were beginning to predict the end of the long reign of the battleship as Queen of the Sea. Experiments by the Royal Navy with aircraft carriers had shown that launching and retrieving aeroplanes at sea was a perfectly practical proposition—it all depended on the power of future aircraft to carry bombs or torpedoes large enough to damage dreadnoughts; a proposition which was fiercely resisted by battleship admirals and just as fiercely propounded by the airmen.

In between the wars the three major naval powers—Britain, the USA and Japan—hedged their bets, building both types of capital ship. But of these three powers, Japan alone produced aircraft to match, and by the outbreak of World War 2 she was far ahead in carrier planes, if not in carriers. (In addition, she was building the world's largest battleships.)

In the European war, the British deployed their carriers mainly in the Mediterranean, where they were of great value. However, the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck* was performed by carriers and battleships acting together; the carriers slowed *Bismarck*, but it was battleship guns (and torpedoes) which sank her. Then in 1941 the British lost two capital ships (*Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*) to Japanese planes, and it was proven beyond doubt that modern aircraft had the capacity to sink even the heaviest warships.

The Pacific, by contrast, was mainly a carrier war—from the moment that Japanese carrier planes sank a quantity of American battleships at Pearl Harbor in December 1941. At the Coral Sea and Midway, carrier planes entirely decided the issue—for the first time in history. And thereafter, the Americans steadily outbuilt their enemies in carriers and planes, while the quality of the latter (and their crews) steadily improved. Every one of the major Japanese sea defeats was achieved by US carrier groups, battles in which the powerful dreadnoughts on either side played only supportive roles (i.e. shore bombardment).

In Europe, the last major sea action fought by a battleship against its own kind was the sinking of *Scharnhorst* by HMS *Duke of York* in 1943. In the Pacific, USS *Washington* and *South Dakota* fought and sank *Kirishima* in a rare, radar-assisted night action in the same year.

At the end of the war the aircraft carrier was, beyond doubt, the dominant weapon at sea; no more battleships were to be built, though the Americans prudently mothballed their final class, the *Iowas*. Today, it could be said that even the mighty nuclear-powered carriers of today are subordinate to a new dominant sea weapon—the nuclear submarine—while the *Iowas* are now being refitted with a new generation of weapon systems to bring them back into service. The battleship is not yet dead.